

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-14 EB-11 COME-00 AID-20 TRSE-00

SWF-02 AGR-20 CIAE-00 INR-11 NSAE-00 RSC-01 SP-03

DRC-01 /100 W

----- 095410

R 290845Z AUG 74

FM AMCONSUL LAHORE

TO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 0135

AMCONSUL KARACHI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAGR, PK

SUBJECT: PUNJAB AGRICULTURE MINISTER CONFIRMS TROUBLES FACING  
KHARIF AND RABI CROPS

REF: LAHORE 1154

BEGIN SUMMARY: DURING INTRODUCTORY CALL ON PUNJAB MINISTER  
AGRICULTURE BRIGADIER (RET.) SAHIBDAD KHAN AUGUST 28, I  
QUESTIONED MINISTER IN DETAIL RE ALLEGATIONS REPORTED  
REFTEL CONCERNING THREAT TO CURRENT KHARIF CROP AS WELL AS  
NEXT RABI CROP DUE TO LOSS OF WATER FROM TARBELA. MINISTER  
DENIED ANY EFFECT FROM TARBELA SITUATION ON KHARIF CROP --  
THOUGH HE READILY ACKNOWLEDGED SERIOUS THREAT TO IT  
FROM PREVAILING GENERAL DROUGHT CONDITIONS -- BUT CONFIRMED  
THAT CONSEQUENCES OF TARBELA PROBLEM FOR NEXT RABI CROP WILL  
BE STRONGLY ADVERSE. END SUMMARY.

1. REGARDING STANDING KHARIF CROP, MINISTER SAID HE HAD  
NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT LOSS OF TARBELA WATER WOULD IN  
ANY WAY EFFECT PRESENT CROP IN PUNJAB. HE CONSIDERED  
POINT WORTH CHECKING OUT, HOWEVER, AND POSED QUESTION  
DIRECTLY TO SECRETARY AGRICULTURE BY QSONE. SECRETARY  
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REPLIED HE UNAWARE ANY TARBELA WATER HAD BEEN EXPECTED TO

BE USED FOR CURRENT KHARIF CROP, INCLUDING FLOODING OF RICE FIELDS AT LAST STAGE, BUT AGREED INQUIRE FURTHER AND REPORT BACK. (COMMENT: THIS WOULD APPEAR CONTRADICT THAT PART OF PRAZAK'S ALLEGATIONS REPORTED REFTEL, IF WE UNDERSTOOD HIM CORRECTLY.)

2. MINISTER, HOWEVER, WENT ON TO OBSERVE THAT CURRENT KHARIF CROP, ESPECIALLY OF RICE AND SUGARCANE, IS IN FACT SUFFERING SERIOUSLY FROM "DROUGHT" DUE TO INADEQUATE MONSOON RAINS, WHILE COTTON CROP IS LIKELY BE BETTER THAN EXPECTED SINCE IT BENEFITS FROM DRIER CONDITIONS. HE ASSERTED WATER AVAILABLE FOR CURRENT CROP HAS BEEN "FAR BELOW NORMAL" DUE TO GREATLY REDUCED RAINFALL THIS YEAR BOTH DIRECTLY ON FIELDS AND IN CATCHMENT AREAS. HE SURPRISINGLY CLAIMED THAT RAINFALL HAD BEEN ONLY AROUND ONE-THIRD LAST YEAR'S LEVEL. (WHEN I ASKED IF HE PERHAPS MEANT "DOWN BY" ONE-THIRD HE EMPHATICALLY SAID HE MEANT "DOWN TO" ONE-THIRD.) HE CONSIDERED IT IRONIC THAT THERE HAS BEEN ANY CONCERN ABOUT FLOODS THIS YEAR WHEN RAINFALL HAS ACTUALLY BEEN SO SPARSE. HE WAS NOT, HOWEVER, PREPARED TO HAZARD ESTIMATE OF HOW MUCH KHARIF CROP MIGHT HAVE SUFFERED.

3. REGARDING OUTLOOK FOR NEXT RABI CROP, MINISTER DECLARED WITHOUT HESITATION THAT LOSS OF ANTICIPATED IRRIGATION WATER FROM TARBELA WILL HAVE CRIPPLING EFFECT ON GOVERNMENT'S PLANS FOR MARKEDLY INCREASING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION STARTING WITH NEXT RABI (WINTER) CROP, INCLUDING CULTIVATION OF NEW ACREAGE AND EXPANDING CASH CROPS. HE FEARED LOSS OF EXPECTED ADDITIONAL WATER WOULD SET GOPUNJAB PLANS FOR INCREASED PRODUCTION "BACK TWO YEARS". SAID GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO GET BUSY IMMEDIATELY TO "READJUST" FUTURE TARGETS DOWNWARD TO CONFORM WITH LESSER WATER SUPPLY AVAILABLE FROM CANAL IRRIGATION AND TUBEWELLS. IN PARTICULAR, RATIO BETWEEN PLANNED PRODUCTION OF FOODGRAINS FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION AND CASH CROPS WOULD HAVE TO BE READJUSTED EMPHASIZING FORMER OVER LATTER IN ORDER TO COPE WITH ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS OF RISING POPULATION. THIS WOULD MEAN LOWER FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS FROM AGRIC EXPORTS THAN ANTICIPATED.

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4. PUTTING BEST POSSIBLE FACE ON SITUATION, MINISTER CONCLUDED THAT NEXT RABI CROP SHOULD AT LEAST BE AS GOOD AS LAST ONE, BARRING ANY NET SHORTFALL OF AVAILABLE WATER OR POWER FOR TUBEWELL IRRIGATION AS COMPARED WITH LAST RABI SEASON. IT WAS DENIAL OF PROSPECTIVE LARGE INCREASE IN PRODUCTION USING TARBELA WATER -- NOT FEAR OF NET REDUCTION IN NEXT RABI CROP -- WHICH

TROUBLED HIM MOST.

5. FINALLY, MINISTER OBSERVED THAT MAIN IMMEDIATE DANGER FROM TARBELA REMAINS POSSIBLE DAMAGE TO BARRAGES, IRRIGATION CANALS AND OTHER WORKS DOWNSTREAM IN PUNJAB AND SIND. IT NOT AT ALL CERTAIN YET THAT GREATLY INCREASED FLOW OF WATER FROM TARBELA DOWN INDUS, COUPLED WITH NATURAL FLOW AT THIS SEASON, COULD BE CONTAINED BY WORKS ALONG THE WAY. MUCH DEPENDS, HE POINTED OUT, ON LEVEL OF RAINFALL IN DAYS AHEAD. HE PLANS IN NEXT DAY OR SO TO MAKE INSPECTION TOUR TO SOUTH, INCLUDING NORTHERN PART OF SIND, TO SURVEY SITUATION.

6. COMMENT: GENERAL SITUATION BEGINNING TAKE ON EARMARKS OF VICIOUS CIRCLE WITH POTENTIAL PROBLEMS REGARDLESS WHETHER RAINFALL INCREASES OR REMAINS SPARSE. INCREASINGLY EVIDENT THAT CURRENT CROP IS SUFFERING FROM INSUFFICIENT RAINFALL WHILE ROSY PROSPECT OF GREATLY INCREASED AGRIC PRODUCTION NEXT SEASON HAS VANISHED. MAIN QUESTIONMARK NOW IS WHETHER SUFFICIENT WATER WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR BOTH IRRIGATION AND POWER GENERATION NEXT RABI SEASON EVEN TO REACH LEVEL OF LAST RABI CROP. IN THIS, SAHIBDAD MAY BE UNDERESTIMATING PROBLEM IF PRAZAK'S INFORMATION ABOUT PROSPECTS OF MANGLA DAM -- ON WHICH SO MUCH OF WATER AND POWER FOR RABI CROP DEPENDS -- IS CORRECT.  
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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 29 AUG 1974  
**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** martinml  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1974LAHORE01176  
**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** N/A  
**Errors:** N/A  
**Film Number:** D740239-0749  
**From:** LAHORE  
**Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Image Path:**  
**ISecure:** 1  
**Legacy Key:** link1974/newtext/t1974088/aaaaagqd.tel  
**Line Count:** 144  
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM  
**Office:** ACTION NEA  
**Original Classification:** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 3  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** LAHORE 1154  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** martinml  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 22 AUG 2002  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <22 AUG 2002 by shawdg>; APPROVED <05 MAR 2003 by martinml>  
**Review Markings:**

Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
30 JUN 2005

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** PUNJAB AGRICULTURE MINISTER CONFIRMS TROUBLES FACING KHARIF AND RABI CROPS  
**TAGS:** EAGR, PK, (KHAN, SAHIBDAD)  
**To:** ISLAMABAD  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005